

MIT FSILG ACCREDITATION

Report of the AILG Accreditation Committee
Academic Year 2011-12

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Abstract

This report describes the Accreditation Program during the 2011-12 academic year, as operated by the Association of Independent Living Groups (AILG). The AILG Accreditation Program is an organized peer review of the living groups within the MIT Fraternity, Sorority, and Independent Living Group (FSILG) community. This was a very active and productive year, and the program's processes have developed to a mature, steady-state operation. The findings of the Visiting Committees are summarized in the body of this report and presented in detail in the appendices. In particular, there were many “best practices” identified, some of which were developed independently by several living groups. The Visiting Committees also pointed out areas where our living groups need improvement and have documented lessons learned that living groups should avoid having to learn independently. We believe the process of review as carried out under this program has led to an overall improvement in the FSILG community.

Overview

The program has been under development over several years and has evolved considerably over that time. This was the fifth year in which the program was operated by the volunteer Accreditation Committee. This group met monthly to plan operations and to advise and direct the part-time Accreditation Coordinator. With this formal structure, the program is considered to be in regular operation. Our processes continue to evolve to become more and more robust, and the program assists our members to thrive and become stronger. As our members improve, we continue to raise the bar for all and find new areas to evaluate and new problems to solve. As the value of the program becomes more apparent, our member organizations are more willing to participate in and cooperate with the process. The interviews by Visiting Committees consist of conversations which are rich and mutually beneficial, resulting in more information sharing and cooperation between sometimes competing organizations. Because the process requires alumni and undergraduates to work together, and by requiring alumni organizations to be truly involved with organizational operations, we have observed greater inter-generational cooperation. By sending both men and women to evaluate FSILGs we have fostered cooperation across genders and better understanding of organizational diversity.

A total of 21 reviews at 18 different FSILGs were conducted this academic year. During the Fall Term, 8 reviews were conducted, and during the Spring Term, 13 reviews were conducted. The Spring reviews included second reviews for three of the organizations reviewed in the Fall. The year ended with all organizations recommended for accreditation, although in four cases the Visiting Committee expressed “reservations.” These four organizations were found to need improvements in areas of governance, oversight, and recruitment, and will be revisited during fall 2012. Two more organizations will be revisited in fall 2012 upon request of the FSILG

office. Five organizations recommended for accreditation will be invited for one-year reviews, in three cases to ensure recent improvements in internal programs and processes are successful and well-implemented; in one case to review progress on tax and legal restructurings of the alumni and undergraduate organizations; and in the final case to provide additional assistance, recommendations, and oversight to one of MIT's newest organizations that has only recently become residential. The assistance of experienced volunteers and MIT staff is being offered to all organizations found to be needing improvement. Our past observation has been that in most of the cases where Visiting Committees have expressed reservations, or have withheld a recommendation for accreditation, we have seen progress and cooperation between alumni and undergraduates for improvement.

The balance of the report is organized as follows. Section 1 provides some of the highlights of the 2011-12 academic year that distinguish it from our previous years. Section 2 outlines the Program Objectives. Section 3 provides an outline of the AILG-organized accreditation review approach. Section 4 summarizes the results of the Accreditation Program for this year, providing an overview of the review status. Section 5 gives a summary of areas where the Accreditation Program can and should be improved, and provides planning information for next year. Section 6 acknowledges everyone who gave time and resources over the 2010-11 year to the Accreditation Program. Section 7 provides references to online resources to find more information about the AILG and the Accreditation Program for readers so inclined.

Appendices A, B, and C summarize the results and observations documented by the Visiting Committees this past academic year.

Also, we have compiled a Compendium of the complete review reports from all of the 21 reviews run in the 2011-12 Accreditation Program. This document is available only by request to members of the MIT AILG community. Any responses to reviews received from the FSILGs are also included in the Compendium.

1. Highlights of the 2011-12 Academic Year

The 2011-12 academic year was a busy one for the Accreditation Program, but saw several major highlights for the Accreditation Program that deserve special mention in this report. First is the entirely new system for the Basic Data Form (BDF) that centralizes data for multiple editors to have easy access. Second is our progress at recruiting new volunteers, including several from organizations that had never before provided volunteers. Finally, we decided to discontinue a pilot program for “off-cycle” reviews.

1.1. New Basic Data Form System. Before the start of the 2011-12 academic year an entirely new BDF was implemented by the Accreditation Coordinator, allowing for on-line storage of the BDF. This meant organizations no longer needed to save the HTML file to individual computers and email around organizations, a common complaint in previous years that collaboration was difficult. The system was populated with all the information from the most recent BDFs. To ensure security of the confidential information the data is encrypted using an aes-256-cbc cipher with a key generated by a passphrase known only to the organization, the Accreditation

Coordinator, and the Chairman of the Accreditation Committee, and none of the information is stored on Athena. We view this overhaul of the BDF system as a major step forward in simplifying the completion of the BDF, allowing more time and energy to be spent on more productive pursuits.

1.2. Increased Participation of FSILGs in Visiting Committees. The Accreditation Committee stated last year that a goal was to have each and every FSILG provide at least one member to serve on a Visiting Committee. Our intent was twofold: first, to alleviate volunteer burnout, and second, to foster sharing of ideas by having volunteers bring ideas they observe back to their own organizations. While we have not achieved one hundred percent participation, we were successful in recruiting volunteers from five organizations who had never volunteered before, broadening our volunteer base.

1.3. Off-Year Review Pilot Program. Last year we undertook a pilot program to try and monitor FSILG status in the two years between full reviews by having an off-year review where FSILGs resubmitted the BDF. Our limited pilot program of three organizations in Spring 2011 seemed successful, so in Fall 2011 we expanded the program to eight chapters (almost all that had been reviewed in Fall 2010 and recommended for accreditation without reservations). In short, the committee did not feel this was as valuable, both for lack of FSILG excitement about the program and the fact that the BDF is but one part of accreditation, and an insufficient one to base any real determination on. While there are aspects of the program that the committee felt important – such as promoting more alumni/undergraduate interactions and allowing each year of undergraduate leadership the opportunity to partake – we decided to end the program after Fall 2011.

2. Program Objectives

There are two main objectives of the Accreditation Program:

- provide a program in which FSILG undergraduate leaders and the AILG (the alumni leaders of MIT FSILG house corporations and advisory boards) may actively exchange ideas to improve the FSILG community and support its members by operating the Accreditation Program as peers; and
- provide the MIT administration with a multidimensional evaluation of the overall health of each MIT organization that qualifies as a FSILG.

3. Review Approach

3.1. Preparation. The reviews held during the 2011-12 academic year followed an approach that began with a prototype seven years ago and has been operational for over four years. The approach consists of peer reviews by Visiting Committees sent to evaluate the health of each organization in the areas of Governance and Oversight, Financial Condition and Planning, Recruitment and Retention, Member Development and Values, Scholarship and Behavior, and the condition of the Physical Plant. An important difference between this program and other

programs that we are aware of elsewhere is our focus on the evaluation of the owners, the alumni organizations, and their effectiveness in both operational and social involvement with their undergraduate organizations. The majority of FSILG real estate, worth over \$100 million, is owned by MIT alumni groups, and over 200 alumni are actively involved in the operation of the FSILGs. The Accreditation program is an important part of protecting and upgrading that significant investment.

The first year of the program, the 2004-05 academic year, was viewed as a trial period. Two FSILGs were reviewed using a question-and-response approach that required several site visits. The scope of the review questionnaire was developed for these reviews. The visit schedule was thought to be overly time-consuming to apply to the entire FSILG community, even on a two-year rotating basis, so visits were limited to about two hours per house in the 2005-06 academic year. The questionnaire was tightened, with fewer long-format answers, to reduce the effort to complete to about eight hours and to limit reviews to two hours. Seven more living groups were reviewed. For the 2006-07 academic year, the questionnaire was recast so that responses could be provided in spreadsheet form but was otherwise unchanged. The visits were shortened to 90 minutes, but feedback from Visiting Committees during Spring 2008 resulted in returning to two hour visits for academic years from 2008-09 onward.

The Accreditation Committee has a new website as part of the AILG's overall redesign. Our website there contains information on review dates, previous reports, and status updates (including handouts from various plenaries). There are also links to the website created in spring 2008, which include the operational information maintained by the Accreditation Coordinator. The addresses of these websites are provided in Section 7 of this report (References). As in the previous year, the operational site was used to post current schedules, status, results, and active documents. In this past academic year, there was a major innovation – the BDF was converted into an online form with item-by-item instructions, allowing members of the FSILG to work as a team to update the data and, when completed, notify the Accreditation Coordinator. The BDF is constructed as a script permitting continual minor updates to the questions as suggestions are received throughout the year. Organizations are able to import their answers from prior reviews into the current form, which merges the data, even where new questions have been added to the form.

Three to four weeks in advance of the review, reminders are sent to each living group asking them to complete the questionnaire no later than two weeks before the scheduled visit. We emphasize that Alumni and Undergraduates are expected to work together to complete the questionnaire. The online system allows the partially completed document to be saved by the person working on it. Once the FSILG has completed work on the online questionnaire, they notify the Accreditation Coordinator, who makes PDF copies and distributes these to the members of the Visiting Committee. The saved form is continually available to the FSILG to help start the next review, typically two years later. The design allows information from identical questions to carry forward and tabular information to flow to previous years, even after changes are made to the form to add or delete questions.

The Visiting Committees consist of three to four AILG members each. We request that each FSILG provide at least three members of the house corporation or advisory team (and preferably more) and at least three active undergraduate members of the living group (and preferably more for a learning experience) to discuss and clarify the responses. The undergraduate members present are usually the officers—president, house manager, or treasurer. The questionnaire responses are distributed to the reviewers before the review in most cases. While we had improvement over previous years, there were a few FSILGs whose work on the form was still incomplete on the day before the review. These were distributed and used along with additional data acquired at the review.

3.2. Timetable. Six Saturdays, one in each month from October through December and March through May were selected for reviews. In addition, one Sunday evening in April was selected to accommodate the sincerely-held religious beliefs of one of our member organizations. One to four reviews were held on each Saturday with one or two Visiting Committees each conducting one or two reviews, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. We successfully completed all 21 of our planned reviews.

We began each review day with a 30-45 minute meeting over a full hot breakfast where we briefed each of the Visiting Committees about the schedule and to discuss review procedures to maintain uniformity. Breakfast was available at 8:00 AM and we began discussions at 8:15 AM with all reviewers. The first review of the day started at 9:00 AM. After each two hour review, an hour was scheduled for the group to organize notes and complete a first draft of their report. Lunch was available as early as 11:00 AM during the discussion, with a formal lunch break from 12:00 noon until 1:00 PM. If a Visiting Committee only had a single review, the Visiting Committee left after lunch. Otherwise, a second review was conducted from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM. After the review, as in the morning, an hour was scheduled for work on the draft report. Soft drinks or juices and snacks were provided as an afternoon refreshment. We asked Visiting Committees to submit their reports within one to two weeks of their visits.

We believe that having a dedicated room reserved on campus for each review day to serve as a base of operations, and a place where the initial drafts could be completed, makes for a much more organized and productive day, and contributes to significantly more rapid report completion.

In the case of the one Sunday evening review, the Visiting Committee met with the Accreditation Coordinator for dinner at 5:00 PM for introductions, a discussion of the schedule, and a review of procedures. The Visiting Committee then met in the basement conference room of the Student Center for the 6:30 PM review, which concluded at 8:30 PM where soft drinks, juices, and snacks were available for the initial drafting of the report.

3.3. Resources and Budget. In aggregate, alumni involved in this program donate an estimated 900 hours per academic year to keep the program running smoothly. Each of our 30 reviewers (whose names appear under “Acknowledgments”) contributed four to eight hours of time during one day of reviews, and a third participated on two or more out of the six Saturdays and one Sunday (and in some cases represented their own organization on the other side of the table on

some other Saturday). Four to six additional hours were spent examining the questionnaire responses prior to the review and completing the reports for each living group. As a result, individual reviewers spent between 10 and 30 hours on accreditation. In addition, for each of the five reviews in which the reviewers expressed reservations, the AILG board spent three to six person-hours reviewing, making changes to, and approving each report.

Based on what was learned about this in previous years, at the end of the 2006-7 year, the previous Accreditation Chair, Herman Marshall, submitted a proposal to provide some paid assistance to the volunteers. The proposal was implemented with some modifications, and the current model provides a budget for a paid Accreditation Coordinator plus breakfast, lunch, and afternoon refreshments for the volunteer visitors and minor incidentals, such as taxis between campus and the FSILGs, when needed.

This year's program continued with what appears now to be a successful steady-state operation. We operate with a volunteer Accreditation Committee consisting of five alumni volunteers including Chairman David Hutchings, David Burmaster, Bob Ferrara, Herman Marshall, and Ernie Sabine. Regular meetings of the committee were held approximately monthly and were attended by a representative from the MIT FSILG Office, Marlena Love, and former volunteer John Covert, who continued in the position of Accreditation Coordinator. John spent approximately 200 hours recruiting volunteers (with significant help from David Burmaster identifying and making the first contact with potential new volunteers), collecting and distributing materials, organizing the review schedules and meals for the Visiting Committees, documenting policies and procedures, and reporting to the Accreditation Committee, AILG Board, and MIT. During the reviews conducted in the 2012-11 academic year, we spent approximately \$1,664 of the meal and minor expense budget, which is about \$238 per review Saturday. The program has contracted with FCI for archival of encrypted data and other miscellaneous services such as arranging meals.

3.4. Execution. A review sheet for use by reviewers developed in the 2006-07 year continued to be used with minor modifications. The four basic parts of the review sheet, which also became the main sections of the completed reviews, were:

Overall finding. As in previous years, there are three possible findings resulting from the review. The Visiting Committee can (1) recommend accreditation, (2) recommend accreditation with reservations, or (3) not recommend that the living group be accredited. The Visiting Committee should explain any reservations well enough that officers of the living group can take appropriate action before the next review. The Visiting Committee must enter a detailed explanation if they do not recommend that the living group be accredited. Organizations recommended for accreditation without reservations will be reviewed again in approximately two years. For the other two findings, a revisit is scheduled during the next term. If the finding is “not recommended for accreditation,” the Dean of Student Life and the FSILG Office schedule an intervention to help the organization improve before its next review.

General comments for MIT and AILG members. In this section, the Visiting Committee lists the best practices, areas needing improvement, and lessons learned. Any items listed here will also be provided to the MIT Dean of Student Life and publicly distributed to the AILG.

Private comments for the living group. This section, used sparingly by policy, is for items that are of a more sensitive nature. This section allows the Visiting Committee to make comments that reflect the detailed discussion during the review. These may involve confidential information that was disclosed at the time of the review or in the data provided before the review. Examples are specific suggestions about finances, personnel, or behavior. The degree of privacy afforded to these comments continues to be a topic of significant discussion within the Accreditation Committee and with the AILG Board. We adopted the following written policy for these comments: (i) we send private comments with the report to the living group, (ii) when the report is filed, the private comments are maintained separately, (iii) in the event of a "recommend accreditation with reservations" or "not recommended" finding, the private comments will be provided to the next Visiting Committee and the AILG board, (iv) the private comments are not sent to the Dean's office, and (v) the retention period for the private comments is 10 years in the archives.

Suggestions about the review process. The reviewers may comment on, or make suggestions about, the review process itself in order that the process may be improved.

3.5. Completion. Report delivery improved over prior years. Thirteen (62 percent) of the reports were sent to the FSILGs within two weeks (ten within one week) and none of the reports took more than five weeks. The Accreditation Coordinator only rarely had to resort to repeated email reminders to members of Visiting Committees. All reports were completed before the end of the academic year, and after necessary approvals by the AILG Board, all reports were forwarded to the Deans by August 6. The policy that either the scribe or the Visiting Committee chair could unilaterally declare a report complete if other committee members were non-responsive did not need to be applied this year; all visitors remained engaged until reports were completed.

As in previous years, the scribe or committee chair (at their option) would send the completed reviews directly to the FSILG house corporation or advisors with a request for their comments to be returned within five business days. Template cover letters for this purpose were supplied to the Visiting Committees. In order to avoid a perpetual cycle of comment-revise-comment-revise the Visiting Committees were not required to revise their reports based on the FSILG comments, but were free to correct any "errors of fact" if the committee agreed with the FSILG that changes were appropriate. Any report that was substantially changed, either through this process or by the AILG Board in the case of adverse findings, was returned for an updated set of comments from the FSILG. This occurred only once.

Those reviews receiving a finding of recommend accreditation (no reservations) together with their response, if any, were forwarded to the Deans by the Accreditation Coordinator shortly after the comment period had expired. Those where the finding included reservations were first sent to the AILG Board for their concurrence with the committee's finding, and, if the Board concurred, sent to the Deans. Our policy is the same for cases where the Visiting Committee did

not recommend accreditation, though this did not occur during the 2011-12 academic year. In the event the report needed to be sent back to the Visiting Committee for editing, a new response was requested from the FSILG only if the changes were substantive.

4. Review Results

During academic year 2011-12, we reviewed 18 of the 39 FSILGs which are currently active at MIT. Three of these were reviewed both in the Fall and again in the Spring. The year ended with all 18 organizations recommended for accreditation, although in the case of four of these final reports included “reservations”. These organizations were found to need improvements in areas of governance and oversight; they will be revisited next term. Please see the table at the end of this section for specific detail.

In the case of the organizations where the finding included reservations, the Visiting Committees listed the reasons for their decision in the findings in their reports (see the Compendium). Written responses to reviews submitted by organizations, if any, are also included immediately after each report. These responses, after removal of anything pertaining to the private comments section of the reports, will be kept with the reports and have been forwarded together with the reviewers' reports to the MIT administration.

MIT volunteers and staff offer assistance to all organizations needing improvement.

Due to the fact that students transition through each residential living group over a 3 year period (sophomore, junior, and senior years), only one-third or less of the students originally present during a review will be present again for a second review two years later. This underscores the need to review every living group every two years as well as the urgency of returning the next term to re-review any organization with a finding including reservations or not recommended.

The table on the next page shows all FSILGs active at MIT during the 2011-12 academic year with the dates and results of the most recent reviews and the planned timeframe for the next review. The names of the 18 FSILGs reviewed during the year are in **bold**.

Group Name	Last Review	Result at last review	Next review
Alpha Chi Omega	30-Oct-2010	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2012
Alpha Delta Phi	25-Sep-2010	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2012
Alpha Epsilon Phi	29-Apr-2012	Recommend Accreditation with Reservations	Fall 2012
Alpha Epsilon Pi	20-Nov-2010	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2012
Alpha Phi	01-Oct-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2013
Beta Theta Pi	07-May-2011	Recommend Accreditation with Reservations	After reorganization
Chi Phi	05-Mar-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2013
Delta Kappa Epsilon	05-Nov-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2013
Delta Tau Delta	07-May-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2012*
Delta Upsilon	07-May-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2013
Epsilon Theta	25-Sep-2010	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2012
Fenway House	05-Mar-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2012*
Kappa Alpha Theta	12-Feb-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2013
Kappa Sigma	30-Oct-2010	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2012
Lambda Chi Alpha	28-Apr-2012	Recommend Accreditation with Reservations	Fall 2012
Nu Delta	02-Apr-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2013
Number 6 Club	03-Dec-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2013
Phi Beta Epsilon	05-May-2012	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2013*
Phi Delta Theta	20-Nov-2010	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2012
Phi Kappa Sigma	10-Mar-2012	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2014
Phi Kappa Theta	12-Feb-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2013
Phi Sigma Kappa	25-Sep-2010	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2012
Pi Beta Phi	03-Dec-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2012
Pi Lambda Phi	05-May-2012	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2013*
pika	07-May-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2013
Sigma Alpha Epsilon	10-Mar-2012	Recommend Accreditation with Reservations	Fall 2012
Sigma Chi	05-May-2012	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2014
Sigma Kappa	12-Feb-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2013
Sigma Nu	28-Apr-2012	Recommend Accreditation with Reservations	Fall 2012
Sigma Phi Epsilon	28-Apr-2012	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2013*
Student House	10-Mar-2012	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2014
Tau Epsilon Phi	05-May-2012	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2013*
Theta Chi	10-Mar-2012	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2014
Theta Delta Chi	28-Apr-2012	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2014
Theta Xi	30-Oct-2010	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2012
WILG	05-Mar-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2013
Zeta Beta Tau	02-Apr-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Spring 2013
Zeta Psi	05-Nov-2011	Recommend Accreditation	Fall 2013

5. Areas of Accreditation that Need Improvement and Other Plans for Next Year

While we believe we have a successful operational model which does not require major changes, carefully considered changes will continue to improve the program. Part of this is in requesting suggestions for improvement from every Visiting Committee. The Accreditation Committee has reviewed all suggestions received from Academic Year 2011-12. In this section we highlight

first those areas where we are considering implementation of changes for next year and then discuss plans for next year and some areas where progress has been made but continued diligence is required.

5.1. Areas of Focus for Next Year

Expanded Volunteer Base. While we have a large enough volunteer pool that volunteer burnout is being avoided and we have increased the participation by women FSILG alumnae, we still need more participation by women. In addition, our 30 Visiting Committee members this year were drawn from only 21 of our 39 organizations – barely half. As soon as practical, we want to expand the pool of volunteers to include at least one alumnus or alumna from each AILG member. The committee strongly believes that this is not only necessary to avoid volunteer burnout but will also allow greater opportunity for sharing of ideas and successes amongst AILG members to enhance FSILG standards for both those representatives on the Visiting Committees and those organizations being reviewed. Potential volunteers are asked to contact the Accreditation Coordinator or any member of the Accreditation Committee.

Facilities Issues. An area of repeated concern from Visiting Committees relates to facilities management. The Accreditation Committee has been working with the Facilities Committee and the Building Safety Facilitator to identify ways to allow for a better method of keeping track of facilities issues. As part of that, in addition to a telephone call to the Assistant Dean and Director of FSILGs by the Visiting Committee Chairs before the review for a sense of behavioral issues at the FSILG, beginning in Spring 2011, Visiting Committee Chairs also call the Building Safety Facilitator for a sense of any pressing facilities issues that may not be reported in the BDF. Further, the committee plans to make available a snapshot of the Safety, Licensing, and Inspection (SLI) “dashboard” to Visiting Committee Chairs before their visit. The SLI dashboard provides a quick overview of the status of licensing and inspection documents that are on file with the FSILG Cooperative Inc (FCI) and, we believe, will provide a valuable tool for assessing facilities at our member organizations. Our goal is to ensure this becomes institutionalized for the coming year to better address and diagnose facilities issues at FSILGs.

Assessment of Accreditation Program. While we believe the Accreditation Program is one of the AILG's premiere programs, and has been recognized both at national fraternal events and by the MIT Alumni Association, it is important to continually assess our progress against our stated objectives. This is especially important in the near-term as the AILG and entire FSILG community is rallying around the FSILG Strategic Plan that was composed over the 2011-12 academic year, and has been endorsed in whole or in part by all major stakeholders, including both undergraduate and alumni leadership. As the FSILG community takes stock of its current programs and initiatives, and how they align with the strategic plan and their original objectives, it is only appropriate that the Accreditation Program do the same.

5.2. Plans and Continued Areas of Focus

Uniform Evaluation Criteria. The committee has wrestled with the tension between subjective and objective evaluation since the inception of the program. In general, we believe that bright-

line tests for overall findings (e.g. the presence of “x” necessitates a finding of not recommend) are inappropriate and blunt tools to provide the necessary guidance for our member groups to improve, and for the MIT administration to have an accurate picture of FSILG life. Instead, we have generally relied on institutional knowledge, by having at least half of the membership of each Visiting Committee be experienced volunteers, and oversight by the AILG Board for adverse finding, to ensure continuity. However, over time we have developed certain specific items that, depending on their severity, should give rise to “reservations” or an inability to recommend accreditation. The first of these which we codified was failure to have submitted the IRS Form 990s. Even though it might seem that this is a simple “yes or no,” one of the first committees to have to consider this particular metric pointed out that an organization might have a long history of doing this correctly, may have just missed a single year, and may already have plans in place to file as soon as possible.

Schedule. To continue with our two year planned review cycle and our next term revisitation schedule, we must review 17 organizations next year which have not been reviewed since the 2010-11 academic year and are being reviewed two years after their previous review, and revisit 11 organizations identified above as needing improvement or requiring a revisit in less than two years. Of the 11 organizations being revisited in less than two years, four are being revisited due to being accredited “with reservations,” while the other seven are being revisited due to an earlier return being recommended by the Visiting Committee for Areas Needing Improvement that did not rise to the level of a reservation, a request by the FSILG office, or due to a major change at the organization (e.g. transitioning from non-residential to residential).

Our schedule for next year has us reviewing 15 FSILGs during the Fall Term. During the Spring Term we have planned reviews at 13 FSILGs, plus any revisits in the Spring Term required as a result of findings returned from the Fall Term reviews.

6. Acknowledgments

We extend our warmest thanks to all the volunteers who have participated in this program. We thank the house corporation members and undergraduates who, in the process of being reviewed, have put many hours into preparing data and in contributing to the future success of MIT's FSILG community. We especially thank the Visiting Committee members who participated in the reviews and helped write the reports during this period: Ryan Andrews, Dave Burmaster, Sanjay Divarkaran, Caroline Fernandes, Bob Ferrara, Aimee Forsythe, Mike Garcia, Michael Howard, David Hutchings, Jim Janosky, Keith Kallberg, Jim Latimer, Alice Leung, LeAnn Lindsey, Herman Marshall, Akil Middleton, Jason Mondanaro, Herb Mower, Rich Possemato, Vic Rhoads, Deninis Rivera, Matthew Rodriguez, Bob Sandman, Erik Stockham, Andrew Sudbury, Steve Summit, Rick Winterson, Mitch Westwood, Sara Wilmer, and Yumi Yasutake. And we thank all the participants in previous years who helped to develop a successful, working program.

A great deal of thanks is also due to the MIT staff in the office of the Dean of Student Life who supported this program, especially Deans Marlana Love, Henry Humphreys, and Chris Colombo, whose support of this program has helped greatly to ensure its success.

7. References

AILG Historical Website, accreditation main page (past documents):
ailg.mit.edu/committees/ailg-accreditation-program/

Accreditation Coordinator's operational website (current documents, results, and policies):
web.mit.edu/ailg/ailgreviews/

Appendix A: Best Practices in the MIT FSILG Community

A sampling of the “best practices” identified by the Visiting Committees is presented below, edited slightly to avoid mentioning specific organizations. Many of these practices were reported to be in operation at more than one organization. All of the best practices are contained in the full reports in the Compendium, available to any member of the MIT AILG community. It is important to note that a best practice found in one living group may not necessarily be appropriate for another – these are not “one size fits all” situations. Rather, the idea is to offer practices for the consideration of each individual living group. Should a group desire more information about any particular item, please contact the Accreditation Coordinator or any member of the Accreditation Committee. Please recognize that each of these items was extracted from the Visiting Committee reports which were written by dozens of authors with different writing styles.

Governance and Oversight

1. Having assistant officers within each “department” of the organization. This allows members to shadow positions in preparation for roles with greater responsibility.
2. Gathering input from members to improve processes. One chapter used input from members and feedback from regional conferences to improve chapter activities ranging from recruitment/pre-recruitment planning to the new members program.
3. Engage with professional third parties, such as CPAs and lawyers, when faced with complex or critical decisions.
4. One chapter has an the “alumni relations chair” held by an alumnus, who is responsible for communicating with the undergraduates and bringing their concerns and ideas to the alumni.
5. Providing the undergraduate president's phone number to all neighbors.
6. One chapter has a Historian position to collate and conserve photos and other historical records, rather than wait many years and try and make sense of accumulated, uncategorized materials.

Scholarship

7. Scholarship programs. One chapter matches sophomores with juniors and seniors within the same majors as their “academic advisors.” Several chapters organize review sessions before major freshmen exams.

Member Development

8. In addition to the traditional “big sibling,” matching new members with seniors. This creates connections between the senior and new members classes. It also gives new

members an additional resource within the chapter from the day they receive their bids. Another extension is the inclusion of alumni mentors that work alongside the undergraduate big sibling to help with the growth and development of new members.

9. Having open and frank conversations amongst chapter members to broaden the intellectual horizons of members individually and collectively. Such forums are a way of fostering openness and avoiding schisms, and also of discussing and crystallizing what it means to live the values of an organization.
10. Strong involvement and participation in MedLinks and CARMA (Chapter Alumni Risk Management Advisor) programs.

Alumni Programming

11. Developing an “Alumni Membership Program” to host events that engage alumni who are not just officers of the alumni corporation and broaden involvement.
12. Joint active and alumni outings, including apple picking and hiking trips, are beneficial for everyone involved. These especially can help keep local alumni active with the organization.

Financial and Physical Plant

13. Strong financial management. Given a number of organizations are at various stages of major capital renovations, fund-raising and financial management is very important – one chapter has already amassed nearly enough to pay for a complete renovation, another chapter that just recently retained an architect has eliminated all debt. Other chapters have been successful in saving sufficient funds to operate their organizations for more than a year.
14. Utilizing contracts and security deposits for residents.
15. Having an established and detailed capital plan to ensure the safety, longevity, and attractiveness of an organization's physical plant.

Recruitment and Retention

16. Novel recruitment practices can reduce costs. One chapter was successful in exceeding their recruitment targets, while lowering their expenditures, through engaging in continuous recruitment, rather than restricting their activities to “formal” recruitment.
17. Broadening recruitment prospects beyond the “traditional” freshmen during formal recruitment, such as by placing emphasis on CPW (many chapters have CPW chairs or committees), spring recruitment, and recruitment of non-freshmen.

Risk Management

18. One chapter places a great emphasis on risk management, with two members serving as Risk Manager per semester, enabling a greater percentage of the undergraduate membership to understand the challenges and important issues of effective risk management.
19. One chapter, despite not violating any policy and not being required to by MIT, the IFC, or their national, voluntarily called the MIT EMS to come in and lead a discussion with the entire chapter about warning signs of intoxication and appropriate steps to take.
20. One chapter created an alcohol contract that was signed by all members.

Appendix B: Areas of the MIT FSILG Community Needing Improvement

Below are some of the areas where individual organizations needed improvement. As with the previous appendix, these items were often reported at more than one FSILG and have been somewhat generalized. The reports in the Compendium contain all of the specific results reported by the committees.

Governance and Oversight

1. There are organizations that are delinquent in filing Annual Reports with the Commonwealth. There are also organizations that are delinquent in filing tax returns, or have outstanding issues with the IRS, which need to be resolved. Organizations in these situations are advised to retain professional assistance.
2. Communication among alumni corporations, advisory boards and undergraduate chapters needs improvement, such as more frequent in-person visits to the house by a broad set of alumni volunteers, rather than just one individual repeatedly.
3. Many alumni organizations operate largely through the efforts of a particularly small group of key individuals. We need to increase the breadth and depth of experience, avoid overburdening key individuals, and reach out to additional alumni – both young and older MIT alumni and perhaps non-MIT alumni to help serve our organizations.
4. Many of our organizations could improve their governance structures and policies. Some of the concerns raised include: allowing unexcused absences from chapter meetings (e.g. no advance notice of a test, family emergency, etc.); officers meeting as needed, rather than regularly, which tends to foster reactive, as opposed to proactive, leadership; alumni not aware of some of the basic features of undergraduate operations (e.g. budgeting policies); and virtually non-existent officer transition policies (e.g. no binders, wikis, one-on-one meetings, etc.)
5. Some organizations are very late with submitting the BDF, and in some cases, it is rife with errors and inconsistencies, leading to a less productive review for both the Visiting Committee and the organization.
6. Summer housing policies are not always well-defined or enforced.

Financial and Physical Plant

7. In some organizations undergraduates are allowed to owe the chapter large amounts of debt (sometimes for long periods of time, including beyond graduation). Oversight and appropriate use of degree/registration holds from MIT should be used to closely control this. Also, chapters in this situation might consider using a collection service, such as Omega Financial. While services do cost money, in many cases that cost will likely be less than the amount of uncollected house bills (in some cases over 10 percent).

8. Some organizations continue to not raise housebills every year, or have highly volatile housebills that vary up and down from year-to-year. Groups should consult the AILG housebill survey to ensure they are not setting rents that are unsustainable for the long-term.
9. There are some organizations that vest almost all financial responsibility in one individual and could benefit from stronger oversight, particularly if the individual is an undergraduate treasurer.
10. Some organizations are still not using an accounting program or payroll service and relying on undergraduates to properly handle withholding and workman's compensation. Given the legal complexities, organizations are strongly encouraged to use PayChex or similar software and outside experts to avoid potential legal problems.

Member Development

11. Many organizations do not have a faculty advisor.
12. Many organizations do not have a Chapter Alumni Risk Management Advisor (CARMA).
13. There are organizations who are not aware of many of the resources that MIT and the AILG have to offer. While all alumni volunteer time is precious, for some organizations it might be beneficial to increase their involvement with the AILG to become aware of such resources – such as through on an AILG committee or attending AILG education events (e.g. the Alumni Connections Seminar). Also, undergraduates could well benefit from regular attendance at governing council meetings and events (i.e. IFC, Panhel, LGC). In both cases, communication to the rest of the organization is critical.

Risk Management

14. Risk management issues continue to be recurring problems. Organizations must both put a well defined-plan in place and constantly educate their members to properly follow that plan.

Recruitment and Retention

15. Recruitment and retention continue to be issues. Of particular concern are those chapters who have had a number of consecutive semesters of recruitment, but have yet to change their recruitment strategy. Also of concern are those chapters that recruit sufficient numbers, but have a high percentage disaffiliate. In the latter situation, it is important to identify the root cause of disaffiliation – e.g. failure to communicate membership expectations, not carefully selecting candidates for membership in the first place, overburdening new member programs, cliques forming in the chapter – and then work to address these root causes.

Appendix C: Lessons Learned from MIT FSILG Community

Below are some of the lessons learned from individual organizations. As with the previous appendices, these items were often reported at more than one FSILG and have been somewhat generalized. The reports in the Compendium contain all of the specific results reported by the committees.

Alumni Programming

1. Events during Tech Reunions can be difficult to organize, but are an important opportunity to engage alumni of the chapter.
2. Undergraduates are contacting the MIT Alumni Association to help them create alumni databases via tools in the Infinite Connection (such as to foster career mentoring and job opportunities). Alumni are also using such databases for fund-raising.

Financial and Physical Plant

3. More alumni are making use of the SLI “dashboard” to monitor important documents.
4. It takes many years to adequately plan major renovations and plan fund-raising efforts to finance them. There are resources to aid chapters in fund-raising.
5. One chapter contacted local police to perform a security audit of their physical plant, which resulted in numerous recommendations for improvement.
6. It can take time for international students to transfer money from abroad to pay their dues/house bills.
7. One organization focuses on incremental capital expenditures for facility improvements, avoiding large, costly projects and distributing costs over time.
8. There are several important lessons that can be learned from undertaking major renovations, such as the importance of limiting the number of contractors with access to keys and combinations, a sign-in process for all contractors and laborers, and a constant on-site representative from the chapter. Another lesson is that incremental construction plans, that spread the work out over several years, can avoid both a total shutdown of the house and lessen the burden of a regulatory mandate (i.e. the ADA).
9. One chapter installed a security camera after a series of thefts, and within a week an image of the thief was captured and a suspect was apprehended. They also routinely change door combinations.
10. Systems such as PayChex can work well for managing financials with respect to employees, such as cooks.

11. Organizations are making use of security cameras and keyed-entry locks to ensure security and safety.
12. One chapter learned the difficulties that go with having a house not at full capacity (and below ideal capacity), including foregoing certain services.
13. One chapter decided to test the fund-raising capability of its recently established alumni network by aiming to raise \$10,000 for a series of relatively minor renovations. They both succeeded in raising more than their goal and learning several valuable lessons for undertaking a much larger fund drive in the future. They have also made contact with a consultant to assist them with future efforts.

Member Development

14. Difficulties for a chapter brought on by sanctions can lead to increased bonds between undergraduates and alumni, sharper focus on fund-raising, and accelerated renovations.
15. One chapter plans to have parents of undergraduate members ready to talk to parents of new member candidates about their child's FSILG experience.
16. Some chapters have been successful in finding faculty advisors.
17. Some new member education programs include practical skills, such as information and advice on MIT's Financial Aid program.

Recruitment and Retention

18. Providing information regarding costs of membership early in the recruitment process is essential to member retention.
19. Chapters have learned to be more careful in communicating expectations for new members during recruitment, especially if they consider themselves residential and expect each new member to live in the chapter house at the start of the sophomore year.
20. Establishing positive relationships with parents of new members is important.

Governance and Oversight

21. One chapter learned – the hard way – the importance of having remote backup for the files on its server, such as using online services “in the cloud.”
22. While difficult, it is possible to rebuild relationships with a national organization.
23. Some chapters have noted increased quality of life during the summer after strengthening their screening process and requiring rental agreements.

Compendium: FSILG Review Reports

In the “full version” of this report, the accreditation reviews as well as the responses from the reviewed organizations appear after this introductory page. They are organized in alphabetical order by organization.

Because it is the policy of the Accreditation Committee to share the full reports only within the MIT AILG community, posted versions and other widely circulated copies of the summary report do not include the individual reviews. Any member of the MIT AILG community may obtain copies of any or all of the reports by contacting the Accreditation Coordinator or the FSILG Cooperative. Members will be provided copies of the reports for their own organizations in electronic form. Other reports or the entire Compendium will be printed and mailed upon request.